

Attaining and Sustaining Social Change through Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

Profound changes in structures, processes or behaviours in society would aptly describe social change, which could be organic or engineered with societal effect to the extent to which it has become broadly or narrowly inspired, nurtured and affected by mass media interventions particularly in Nigeria. Deploying eclectic empirical qualitative methods and juxtaposing contemporary actualities with literature in sociology and communications, this paper uses Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as instrument for data gathering on social change dynamics, (areas of expectation, content, context effectiveness and effects), by addressing what exactly changes there are in social change and the influence of mass media on these elements. To enhance and stimulate social change knowledge, a group of ten enlightened social commentators and media practitioners are engaged in this discourse to explore the apparent and ostensible influences of mass media on social change by examining the nexus of both the attainability and sustainability of social change through the mass media. Beyond showing the importance of mass media in achieving and sustaining social change, this study examines the measurability of mass media intervention efforts on social change. Possible replication of "Wholesale Social Change" is discussed to the extent to which mass media played prominent roles in the past with its current and futuristic influences on "Retail Social Change". Embedded in the discourse are suggested roles of the citizenry and recommendations that can improve Nigeria or any decent human community.

Keywords: *Social change, attainability, sustainability, mass media, 'wholesale Social change' and 'Retail social change'*

INTRODUCTION

Life is not stagnant and change is an important factor in life. Individuals change and societies change. Haferkamp and Smelser(1991) not only affirm that different reasons could be responsible for different types of changes in society and to different extents, but also should be addressed appropriately. Happer and Philo (2013) posit that “The media play a central role in informing the public about what happens in the world particularly in those areas in which audiences do not possess direct knowledge or experience”.

Mass media as a tool of disseminating knowledge and sustaining information has been of use in different facets of different societies. Mass media would include such efforts made through radio, television and internet broadcasts as well as publications that are available to the citizenry. The use of mass media to attain and sustain social changes remains crucial.

IDENTIFIED PROBLEM

The identified problem in this discourse is the depth or extent of broadly or narrowly defined function of the media in social change.

SOCIAL CHANGE DYNAMICS

•What social change is?

Society has structure, ethos and processes, which lead to certain ways of behaving in that society and these are the norms of that society. Social change is better described than defined, as the chain or series of related or unrelated natural or engineered norm changes in any society over periods of time.

Some theorists see social change in terms of structures and functions while some see it as cultural and systemic transformations. When considering the idea of social change, it is important to identify what exactly are issues that are subject to changes. The possibilities include changes in **structure, changes in processes and changes in behaviour**.

Theories of social change are conflicting but the essence of norm changes, remains uncompromised. In some cases changes in processes are prominent while other forms of norm changes are secondary but in the final analysis, they are interrelated and lead to social change. According to Mondal (2016), this view is supported by Ogbum and Nimkoff's observation of (1958) “An important invention need not be limited to only a single social effect. Sometimes it exerts many influences which spread out in different directions like the spokes of a wheel.”

Although theorists like Ogbum and Nimkoff concentrated on technological change, their conclusions are extendable to other societal systems. For instance, Nigeria changed from a Parliamentary to the Presidential system and changed the structures, processes and behaviours.

Though it is difficult to ascertain with certainty the process of attaining social change in terms of behavioural changes, change in structure would definitely lead to change in processes; however, changes in structure and processes could ultimately affect behaviour. Mondal (2016) states that “Technological developments have affected a lot of changes in attitudes, beliefs and even in traditions. These influence almost all aspects of man's life and culture. These include social customs and practical techniques for converting raw material to finished products.”

•What leads to social change?

What could lead to changes in societal norms (social change)?The University of North Carolina at Wilmington identified several factors and events of history that have acted as the trigger factors of social change but these could also be applied as either macro or micro factors, and these include Agricultural advancements, Industrialization, Weapons production, Information overload, Technological change, Geographical mobility, **Modernization, Urbanization, Bureaucratization**, Conflict and Competition, Political and Legal Power, Ideology, **Diffusion, Acculturation, Evolution**.

•What type of changes?

In this paper, two types of change are discussed: **Organic social change** and **engineered social change**.

1. Organic changes

Notable theorists like Morgan, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and many of their British counterparts believed that societal changes are evolutionary and at best, natural because of the characteristic inevitability of change itself. As a result, many theorists have subscribed to the idea that change happens in a progressive and continuous order. (Mondal, 2016)

In the foresight of Sumner (1934), “It is the greatest folly of which a man can be capable, to sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world, thus foreclosing the possibility of orchestrating any form of social change”.

2. Engineered changes

As true as it may appear that some societal changes could be traceable to natural factors, there are certain other changes that have evidently been manually configured or engineered. There is the possibility of 'engineered social change', especially among those who believed in late 50s and the 60s that social change can be engineered and that societal conflicts could lead to social change. Such include: (Coser, 1956) and (Parsons 1961) who as a 'functionalists' see social change as a string of humanly activated social processes that affect systems and roles within a society for the purpose of maintaining societal equilibrium, which is believed to be mobile rather than perfect.

Others in this perceptual view like Van den Berghe (1963) identified three sources of engineered social change which confirm the susceptibility of social change to external machinations of human engineering. The views of Van den Berghe found recent support in Kraidy (2002), who states “Development communication and social marketing ... share the most basic of assumptions: that social change can be achieved by using carefully conceptualized and operationalized persuasion campaigns”. This injects more strength into the views that “engineered social change”, is very possible.

•Effects of social change

Social change expectations and result could depend on the processes involved in bringing forth such changes. For example if social change occurred along natural lines, the expectation of its occurrence would naturally be low or possibly non-existent since no one was expecting changes. On the other hand if social change was engineered, the expectation of its occurrence would be tangential to the resources input in its orchestration.

Changes in the society could occur to rules, procedures, structures and behaviours. Some of these social changes could have positive effects while some could be negative. For example the agricultural advancement through the use of irrigation has led to increased food production and income for the society, while the invention of war equipment has led to the depletion of human and other resources. Even where some aspects of social change could be said to be negative in terms of effects on the citizenry, it is debatable if anyone could engineer a change for negative purposes. Mostly, the results that are negative could be mere natural effects rather than engineered effects. In essence, engineered social change would not necessarily result in engineered effects (desired effects or calculated effects) and some results of engineered social change could be accidental. Environmental degradation and abuse by man for example could lead to disaster such as flood, fire outbreak, etcetera in a community.

ROLE AND INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIA INTERVENTION IN ATTAINING AND SUSTAINING SOCIAL CHANGE

Though related, a distinction is made between attaining social change and sustaining social change.

•Mass media and attaining social change

Ranging from the limited effects theorists; class dominant or elite dominance theories to Cultural theorist and much more, there have been differing views of the role of mass media in attaining or sustaining social change. While some have ascribed full roles to mass media, others claim it has only limited roles.

In practice however, it is clear that mass media has played active and broad roles in informing and shaping the opinion of the masses through instigative reporting that may have been engineered by a few elites or by policy makers seeking engineered social change.

Mass media has been identified as a virile instrument of development, although the way development is defined could be another issue. Rogers (1978:68) in Kraidy (2002) defined development as "a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement ... for the majority of the people". In essence, development is the positive result of coordinated social change.

Social changes arise mostly because of societal needs and frictions. A method that has been used to solve social problems has been the deployment of social marketing by individuals and groups which according to Kraidy "would benefit from a behaviour change and policy makers who have the power to make policy changes that would enhance the chances of success of social marketing campaigns."

Social marketing is the key to positive social change with the mass media being the main vehicle of social marketing, and the master key to social change. According to Kraidy (2002), in spite of social marketing being attacked "for fostering a consumer approach to social change, with its underlying capitalist premise. Still, social marketing has become a preferred approach to creating and sustaining positive social change".

Reckoning the transferability of principles, Kotler and Zaltman(1971;1997) proposed the use of consumer marketing for behavioural changes in the society through what they called the "social marketing theory", based on the idea that marketing theories have been influential in changing buyers' behaviours.

And from earliest of times of this type of inquiry into the role and influence of mass media in social change, Lerner(1958) and Schramm(1964) in Kraidy (2002) both agree "desirable social change could be produced by scientifically designed and executed communication campaigns".

Several theories seem to support the view that mass media has influences on social change through behaviour modification and alteration. For instance, the Cultivation theory identifies television as the incubator of behaviour cultivation, making it obvious that advertisement and other forms of propaganda have been and are useful in shaping and fostering information in the minds of people until they get multiple doses of the same information repeatedly, leading to thoughts and behaviour cultivation.

Additionally, the Agenda Setting theory propounded by McCombs and Shaw(1972); McCombs(2003) which is supported by Scheufele (2000), suggests that the media has the capability to influence the prospective thought-lines of the citizenry. In practice, it would appear that many attempts to achieve engineered social change are combinations of efforts that could be described as 'Agenderized Cultivation', whereby the populace are fed with information targeted at directing their thoughts and behaviour towards specific social agenda of the powers that be.

The areas of influence of mass media could be far-reaching and could span diverse areas of social endeavour. For attaining social change in medical attitudes, for instance, Bankole, Rodriguez& Westoff (1996), report that "The analysis of cross-sectional data suggests that contraceptive use and intention are positively associated with exposure to mass media messages and women who are exposed to media messages are more likely to desire fewer children than those who are not exposed to such messages", thus corroborating assertions that mass media interventions have influences on the citizenry.

Kraidy (2002) quoted Peter Golding (1974:39) as a major antagonist of the role of media in achieving national development or in our current context, social change, claiming it to be of exaggerated value. Denying the influence of mass media in achieving social change does not seem to be a smart choice. Underwriting the active influence of mass media, McAllister (1996) is of the opinion that "a well-developed media system, informing and teaching its citizens, helps democracy move toward its ideal state."

Three prominent roles of mass media according to Finnegan Jr. and Viswanath (1997) are the influencing of knowledge; setting of agendas and the cultivation of perceptions. People have the tendency to learn new things as they see or hear them from broadcasts or prints and opinion or behaviour changes could result depending on the level of cultivation achieved through such media interventions.

Attempts have been made by other theorists apart from those of the developmental school of thought, to show the applicability of consumerism theories to issues relating to social change, especially proponents of the social marketing theory. This, according to Kraidy is because "Social marketing theory after all, is derived from concepts developed in marketing and advertising, two areas that focus on making individuals good consumers." And this could have the "risk of regarding individuals as consumers to be persuaded to buy a commodity, rather than citizens to be informed about issues."

Policy makers and those interested in effecting engineered social changes tend to use mass media approaches relating to social marketing theories because of the assumed "relationship of consumption to social change" although "the line between regarding individuals as either consumers or citizens in campaigns focusing on promoting positive social change is understandably difficult to draw, Kraidy says.

Thagard (2014) viewed individual social change as "...the result of multilevel emergence from interacting social and mental mechanisms, which include ... processes that make minds capable of thinking" and therefore anything capable of influencing the mind and thoughts of human beings could be used to effect social change in such individuals and by extension, the society to which they belong. Mass media fits that bill and it is capable of influencing people.

•Mass media and sustaining social change.

Attaining social change does not guarantee sustaining social change but the media has a role to play, yet again. Expectedly, where mass media intervention was used in engineering social change, the same should expectedly be used to nurture the change that occurs.

The purpose of mass media intervention in triggering change is not totally different from its purpose in sustaining that change. Mass media could be used to portray the changes in society and goad the people towards its continuation. For example in Nigeria of 1984, under General Muhamadu Buhari and his assistant, General Tunde Idiagbon, the War Against Indiscipline campaign (WAI) was launched through Mass Media interventions via radio and television, mostly. At first it was successful because it involved consequences but it became a major change when arrested offenders were punished and shown on television. In that case, Mass Media intervention had tremendous influence not only on the attainment but also the sustaining of that WAI project. An evaluation of the broad successes of the WAI project as an example of Social Change in Nigeria is not the focus of this paper. However, the use of mass media to reinforce the change is notable. To resuscitate that scheme, Mass Media intervention would also play a great role.

THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) REPORT ON:**Measuring the Effects of Mass Media Intervention Efforts on Social Change**

Where the change experienced in a society was inspired by other factors other than mass media intervention, it would be difficult to measure the role of mass media intervention in the resultant social changes. On the other hand where the social change was planned or engineered and by default inspired by mass media interventions, the results attained would be its measure.

Corroborating Kraidy (2002), a group of ten enlightened public social commentators from academic and professional callings agreed unanimously that in fact “Research has shown that movement beyond previous models of social change and has advocated more interactivity, transparency, and sensitivity to context in using media for social change. They further opined that even if the influence of the mass media is indirect and difficult to monitor, measure, and understand, the media organisations are important instruments to be used in continuous efforts to improve people's quality of life.

Bandura's social learning theory suggests that human beings learn by observation and behave adaptively according to such learning so obtained. Based on this theory, discussants evaluated the much effects mass media has on social change that are contingent on at least three factors:

1. The content and context of the information disseminated through mass media:

If the mass media intervention produces mere information that was not programmed to affect long-term behaviour, the extent of its effect on social change would naturally be dismal.

2. The observed learning from the information:

If the observed learning from the mass media intervention is skewed towards a particular cause, it is likely that results obtained would be in that direction of the cause.

3. The nature of the social change.

This could be either of two possibilities:

- (a) **Organic change:** Where change in society is expected to be evolutionary or naturally occurring, mass media intervention would not be of practical causative use but could be of maintenance use. (Change occurs by itself and mass media just reports that change and encourage its sustenance). The effects of mass media intervention in such instances could be passive or non-existent.
- (b) **Engineered change:** Where social change is engineered or planned, it is reasonable to expect that mass media interventions would be targeted at specific goals in terms of changes in processes, systems, institutions and behaviours.

It follows that in engineered social change, goals are set and measurements should be possible by looking at the outcomes. The outcomes could be one of three:

1. Meet the target

Where mass media interventions result in meeting exact targets, further mass media intervention should be deployed to maintain the momentum of the result and attempt to achieve increased results.

2. Fall below the target

Where mass media interventions result in lower than the targeted result, further and more aggressive mass media intervention could become necessary but there could be the need to identify why the results were dismal.

3. Exceed the target

Where mass media interventions result in meeting and exceeding the expectations, further mass media intervention should be deployed to harness the gains and encourage continuity.

Whether in terms of broad social change or specific areas of change in any given aspect of community life, mass media is full of possibilities. Where there is at least an autonomous mass media agency, in what Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger call the 'mediatisation of politics', media interventions could be used in political settings to achieve long term effects. Discussants agreed with this and also by extension, submit that mediatisation of political strides, ideas and events could lead to social change.

Organic change possibilities assure the probability of a society attaining social change without mass media intervention. However, the sustainability of such social change is doubtful without engaging in some forms of communications because without the use of mass media, organic or natural changes could occur but the need to nurture such natural or organic changes would normally require some forms of mass media interventions. When there is mass media intervention in a natural/ organic change situation, it serves the purpose of informing the society not only of the changes but also the benefits of such changes with the view of selling the changes to the populace, for continuity to occur.

SOCIAL CHANGE REPLICABILITY AND THE ROLES OF MASS MEDIA

According to McLuhan (1960), the world has become a global village and this is more so now through advances in communication technology. Mass media has been useful in the broadcast of many new developments across the globe and it has become possible for different societies to sieve through such developments and copy them where possible.

•Wholesale and retail social changes

When a particular society attains social change by whatever means, that change becomes their choice. Such changes could be capable of being copied or replicated by other societies and that usually happens through mass media actions. When the original change in a society is replicated in another society, the original change becomes the “wholesale change” and the replicating society would have “retail change”, and in that sense, there will be a 'wholesale-retail effect', through 'copycatism'.

'Copycatism of social change' is both possible and unpredictable. For instance, Castillo (2014) claims “The media and political conflict in Venezuela has been replicated—perhaps less virulent in Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua”. The Arab Springs took a different dimension. The media broadcast of what happened in Tunisia led to similar clamour for changes in other places. And Mass Media was used extensively to achieve such 'wholesale-retail effects'.

In the same way, fashion all over the world follows some kind of 'wholesale-retail effects'. Mostly, mass media broadcasts fashion shows and advertisements and such become societal norms across nations, following a wholesale-retail effect.

Sexuality also experiences profound social change with many nations now allowing same-sex marriages. Though there are other undercurrents, the use of mass media has gone a long way in influencing some forms of “wholesale-retail effects” across many nations.

Replication becomes possible through information and direct activities of social movements. For instance, Castillo (2014) submits, “In Argentina the mass protest of December 2001 in Buenos Aires that caused the end of the government of President Fernando de la Rúa became the seed for further social movements” and social movements rely mostly on mass media support.

Giving examples of North Africa and the Middle East, Miladi (2016) asserts that Mass media has the potential to aid replication of social changes within and across nations. The possibility of 'wholesale-retail effect' is why some closed countries monitor and sanction mass media intervention efforts in such countries. For example in 2014 the people of Hong Kong held mass rallies to support democracy and ask for more elective rights but in the neighbouring China, the news was not allowed because the Chinese authorities understood the capabilities of mass media in bringing wholesale-retail effects, which they did not desire in their own society.

CONCLUSIONS

Social change would occur, either naturally or in some engineered formats. Where Social change occurs naturally, the effects could become unpredictable, unbearable or even undesirable. By contrast, where social change has been planned and engineered, targets of success can be worked upon, although the measurement of social change is practically intriguing.

In both cases of organic and generated changes, the role of Mass media is undeniably great either in positive or negative terms. In cases of engineered social change, mass media would not only be an instrument or device for achieving the desired results, it becomes the 'engine-house' of such changes.

Some changes could be politicised and benefit the rulers but Mass media deployment has to be carefully gauged in order not to be supportive of undesirable changes in the society at the detriment of the citizens. Social changes across borders are usually publicised through mass media interventions and these can have ripple effects worldwide with “wholesale-retail effects”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The freedom of the Press should remain sacrosanct and the autonomy of the Press should become better assured. There should be legal boundaries for the deployment of mass media, not in order to curtail legitimate media operations but to curb the possibilities of misusing mass media operations for undesired social changes. The truth should always be told and if that leads to any form of social change, the society will be the beneficiary.

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